

TOWN OF THUNDERBOLT, GEORGIA

Blight Abatement & Rapid Cleanup Program

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Dana Williams, Mayor, and Members of the Thunderbolt Town Council
FROM: Nicholas Patrick, Thunderbolt Blight and Abatement Program
DATE: July 8, 2026
RE: Blight Abatement & Rapid Cleanup Program Recommended Action & Funding Strategy

This memorandum requests Town action on a blight abatement and rapid cleanup program for Thunderbolt and summarizes the funding landscape available to support it through the remainder of 2026. Overgrown lots, illegal dumping, right-of-way vegetation, and drainage obstructions across town continue to create code enforcement, safety, and quality-of-life concerns. The attached proposal outlines a practical path forward: immediate local action, paired with a phased strategy to pursue state and federal funding as conditions warrant.

For immediate action, I am asking the Town to authorize one of the following three paths:

1. A small on-call cleanup contract for code enforcement and Public Works needs.
2. Emergency standby contractor status for debris, right-of-way, drainage, and nuisance conditions.
3. A pilot blight abatement project covering 5 to 10 problem properties or corridors, with before-and-after photos, parcel documentation, and a fixed price.

My recommendation is a Town-funded pilot now, followed by a Georgia DCA Immediate Threat and Danger application or a Chatham County partnership if conditions on specific properties rise to a documented public health or safety level.

KEY DEADLINE	Thunderbolt Disaster Debris Removal RFP questions due July 10, 2026; proposals due July 17, 2026 (the most immediate vendor opportunity identified).
ALSO NOTE	Georgia Rehousing funding deadline is July 29, 2026, if the Town wishes to pursue a housing-instability angle in partnership with a local government entity.

A detailed proposal follows, including the full range of services available, an assessment of funding opportunities through the rest of 2026, a recommended phased strategy, and community partnership opportunities. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this with the Mayor and Council at the Town's convenience.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicholas Patrick

Thunderbolt Blight and Abatement Program

Thunderbolt Blight Abatement & Rapid Cleanup Support

A Funding Strategy and Program Proposal for the Rest of 2026

Prepared for the Mayor and Town Council — July 8, 2026

Executive Summary

Thunderbolt faces recurring blight conditions: overgrown lots, illegal dumping, right-of-way vegetation, and drainage obstructions that create code enforcement, public safety, and quality-of-life challenges. Addressing these conditions well requires both an immediate local response and a longer-term funding strategy.

The strongest funding angle for the Town is a Town-funded pilot program now, followed by pursuit of a Georgia DCA Immediate Threat and Danger grant or a Chatham County partnership if conditions on specific properties rise to a documented public health or safety level.

Funding opportunities exist through the rest of 2026, but they fall into two distinct tracks: an immediate contract opportunity, in which Thunderbolt pays a vendor directly, and grant or program funding, in which Thunderbolt, Chatham County, a nonprofit, or a public authority applies and then hires vendors later. No single funding source is sufficient on its own; the recommended approach is to build a funding stack across both tracks.

Framing matters as much as funding. “Lawn care” will not carry a grant application. “Blight prevention, code violation abatement, drainage protection, housing stabilization, and disaster recovery” will.

Immediate Action Requested

For immediate action, the Town is asked to authorize one of the following three paths:

1. Small on-call cleanup contract for code enforcement and Public Works needs.
2. Emergency standby contractor status for debris, right-of-way, drainage, and nuisance conditions.
3. Pilot blight abatement project covering 5 to 10 problem properties or corridors, with before-and-after photos, parcel documentation, and a fixed price.

Proposed Program Services

Thunderbolt Blight Abatement & Rapid Cleanup Support would offer the following services:

- Overgrown lot clearing
- Illegal dumping and debris removal
- Right-of-way vegetation cleanup
- Drainage ditch and catch basin clearing support

- Emergency debris response
- Before-and-after photo documentation
- Code compliance support
- Quick-response pricing by parcel, crew day, or task order

Proposed Budget: Remainder of 2026

The following budget addresses the top 5 to 10 blighted properties identified by code enforcement, plus ongoing lawn maintenance for 20 elderly-resident properties, through the end of 2026. Figures assume the pilot mobilizes in July 2026, with property abatement completed up front and lawn maintenance continuing monthly (six cycles: July through December) for the remainder of the year.

Assumptions:

- Priority property abatement: \$1,500 to \$1,800 per property (one-time cleanup, before-and-after photos, parcel documentation), for 5 to 10 properties.
- Elderly-resident lawn maintenance: \$150 per lawn per month, for 20 lawns, billed monthly July through December 2026 (6 cycles).

Budget Summary by Scenario

Line Item	Unit Cost	Quantity	Frequency	Low Estimate	High Estimate
Priority property abatement	\$1,500 – \$1,800 / property	5 to 10 properties	One-time	\$7,500	\$18,000
Elderly-resident lawn maintenance	\$150 / lawn / month	20 lawns	Monthly, Jul–Dec (6 cycles)	\$18,000	\$18,000
Total Proposed Budget				\$25,500	\$36,000

The low estimate reflects 5 properties at \$1,500 each; the high estimate reflects 10 properties at \$1,800 each. Lawn maintenance is held constant across both scenarios, since the 20-lawn elderly resident program is not tied to the number of blighted properties treated.

Recommended Scenario and Monthly Cash Flow

A recommended mid-range scenario: 8 properties at an average of \$1,650 totals \$13,200 for property abatement, plus \$18,000 for lawn maintenance, for a recommended total budget of \$31,200 through the end of 2026. Property abatement is assumed to be completed across the first two months (July and August); lawn maintenance continues monthly through December.

Month	Property Abatement	Lawn Maintenance (20 lawns)	Monthly Total
July 2026	\$6,600	\$3,000	\$9,600
August 2026	\$6,600	\$3,000	\$9,600
September 2026	—	\$3,000	\$3,000
October 2026	—	\$3,000	\$3,000
November 2026	—	\$3,000	\$3,000
December 2026	—	\$3,000	\$3,000
Total	\$13,200	\$18,000	\$31,200

Recommendation: authorize a Town-funded budget in the range of \$25,500 to \$36,000 for the remainder of 2026, with \$31,200 (8 properties, 20 lawns) as the recommended starting point. This can be adjusted up or down as priority properties are confirmed by code enforcement.

Funding Landscape Overview

Yes, funding opportunities exist for the rest of 2026, but they split into two tracks: an immediate contract opportunity (Thunderbolt pays a vendor directly), and grant or program funding (Thunderbolt, Chatham County, a nonprofit, or a public authority applies, then hires vendors later). For blighted properties, cleanup, code enforcement support, vacant lots, drainage-related overgrowth, and housing repair, the Town should not rely on a single funding source, but should build a stack across the opportunities below.

Opportunity	Available for Rest of 2026?	Fit for Thunderbolt	Notes
Thunderbolt Disaster Debris Removal RFP	Yes, immediate	Strong for emergency debris and storm cleanup	Questions due July 10, 2026; proposals due July 17, 2026. The most immediate vendor opportunity identified.
DCA Immediate Threat & Danger CDBG	Potentially yes	Strong if conditions create a public health/safety threat	Supports urgent community development needs when conditions pose a serious and immediate threat. Funding generally up to \$50,000, with match requirements.
Georgia Rehoused	Yes, deadline July 29, 2026	Possible if tied to housing instability, homelessness, or housing recovery	Requires a collaborative partnership including a local government entity. Not a simple lawn/blight fund.
GEMA/FEMA Public Assistance	Only after declared disaster	Good for storm debris, emergency protective work, disaster cleanup	Available to cities/towns inside declared counties; typically reimburses eligible emergency work after the fact.
GEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program	Possible, project-specific	Good for drainage, flooding, storm-risk reduction, repetitive hazard areas	Pre-applications are rolling, but projects must reduce long-term disaster risk and generally require a mitigation plan and local emergency management support.
EPA Brownfields	Prepare now for fall 2026	Strong for contaminated/blighted commercial or industrial sites	No open solicitations as of May 2026, but FY2027 assessment, revolving loan, cleanup, and job-training opportunities are expected.
USDA Community Facilities	Possible year-round if eligible	Possible for public works equipment or essential public facilities	Applications accepted year-round for eligible rural communities; not for routine mowing, but relevant for facilities, equipment, and essential public services.
Chatham County Blueprint Grants	Not likely for rest of 2026	Future planning opportunity	FY27 pre-applications closed February 6, 2026; full applications were due March 13, 2026; funding tied to County budget process.

ARPA Funds	Unclear, likely limited to existing obligations	Possible only if Thunderbolt or County has remaining obligated funds	Chatham County accepted \$56 million in ARPA funds, but ARPA is restricted, not a fresh open grant pool. Reporting/closeout obligations may continue through 2027.
SPLOST	Capital project route, not immediate cleanup	Good for drainage, sidewalks, roads, public safety, infrastructure	Chatham County SPLOST funds specific capital projects, not routine lawn or code enforcement work.

Recommended Phased Strategy

For the rest of 2026, the following order of pursuit is recommended:

Phase 1 — Immediate Local Work: Thunderbolt Pilot or On-Call Contract

Ask the Town to create a small Blight Abatement and Rapid Cleanup Pilot using Town funds. This could move faster than waiting on grant cycles. Suggested scope:

- 5 to 10 priority properties or corridors
- Overgrowth removal
- Illegal dumping cleanup
- Right-of-way clearing
- Drainage obstruction support
- Before-and-after photos
- Parcel-level documentation
- Unit pricing per parcel, crew day, or task order

Phase 2 — Emergency/Urgent Grant: DCA Immediate Threat & Danger

Use this only where the condition is more serious than tall grass. Strong arguments include:

- Blocked drainage or flooding risk
- Mosquito/vector conditions
- Illegal dumping
- Fire hazard
- Unsafe structure or debris
- Emergency access obstruction
- Repeated unresolved code violations

This is likely the best state-level near-term funding option if the Town can document urgency.

Phase 3 — Housing Track: Prepare for the Next CHIP Cycle Now

Even though the 2026 CHIP cycle is closed, Thunderbolt can begin preparing now:

- Map target neighborhoods
- Identify owner-occupied homes
- Document code or habitability issues
- Estimate rehabilitation costs
- Identify income-eligible homeowners
- Line up a grant administrator
- Identify nonprofit or housing authority partners
- Prepare a council resolution and match strategy

Phase 4 — Redevelopment Track: EPA Brownfields or DCA Redevelopment Tools

If Thunderbolt has blighted commercial, industrial, or marina-adjacent sites with potential contamination, EPA Brownfields funding may be a significant opportunity later in 2026. This would not fund routine grass cutting, but could fund assessment or cleanup planning for redevelopment. DCA's CDBG rules also allow activities tied to slum/blight prevention, clearance, demolition, removal of dilapidated structures or junk items, and limited interim assistance such as special refuse collection or trimming and removal of overgrowth in deteriorating areas.

Phase 5 — Disaster Track: GEMA/FEMA

If the Town is dealing with storm debris or disaster-related hazards, documentation is essential. FEMA/GEMA funding usually reimburses eligible public costs after a declared emergency, rather than providing immediate cash. Chatham County recently received FEMA reimbursement for emergency protective measures after Hurricane Helene, demonstrating the reimbursement model in practice.

Georgia CHIP Program: Special Analysis

Georgia CHIP is a good fit for housing repair, but not for immediate blight mowing or lot cleanup. The 2026 Georgia CHIP cycle is already closed: DCA opened the 2026 CHIP cycle with applications due January 31, 2026, and the state later awarded more than \$10 million to 12 communities and organizations in June 2026. Thunderbolt was not listed among the awards identified.

CHIP can fund:

- Owner-occupied single-family housing rehabilitation, generally up to \$500,000 per award.
- New construction or reconstruction of affordable single-family homes for sale to income-eligible homebuyers, generally up to \$1.5 million per award.

The recommended CHIP strategy for Thunderbolt is as follows:

Do not frame this work as lawn care or blight cleanup. Frame it as housing preservation, owner-occupied rehabilitation, code-deficiency correction, and neighborhood stabilization.

Good CHIP-eligible angles could include:

- Roof repair
- Unsafe porches or steps
- Exterior deterioration
- Accessibility improvements
- Electrical, plumbing, or HVAC issues
- Code-related housing repairs
- Owner-occupied homes at risk of decline

Note: a for-profit contractor generally would not be the direct CHIP applicant. The applicant would typically be the Town, a public authority, or an eligible nonprofit, with a contractor procured to perform the work.

Community & Civic Partnerships

Civic Organizations

- In contact with the Boy Scouts; following up, as their National Jamboree runs through the end of July 2026.
- Still reaching out to area churches; would like to set up a meeting between the President of Savannah State University (Dr. Whirl) and Mayor Williams to engage the university's athletic department, Greek organizations, and student groups for assistance.

Continued coordination with Mr. Wade on pressing abatement needs is recommended, particularly the top 10 priority properties and lawns belonging to elderly residents.

Recommendation

For Thunderbolt, funding should be classified and pursued as follows:

Available Now

Thunderbolt local funds, an on-call vendor contract, the disaster debris RFP, and possible emergency procurement.

Potentially Available This Year

DCA Immediate Threat & Danger, Georgia Rehoused, GEMA Hazard Mitigation, EPA Brownfields preparation, and USDA Community Facilities (if eligible).

Prepare for the Next Cycle

Georgia CHIP, the DCA CDBG Annual Competition, Chatham County Blueprint Grants, and larger redevelopment grants.

The strongest short-term move is for the Town to authorize a small, funded pilot now, targeting the top 10 abatement properties and the lawns of elderly residents. Work with Mr. Wade should continue on these pressing issues, while a DCA Immediate Threat and Danger package is prepared for any properties or corridors that can be documented as public health, safety, drainage, or emergency-access concerns.

